Swansea Police Department pays ransom to computer hackers

Swansea police say they were forced to pay $750 in ransom earlier this month to hackers after a virus locked all of their computer files.

The Police Department noticed a problem opening their files on Nov. 6. After opening an e-mail attachment from what looked like a trusted source, a window popped up on the screen saying all the computer's files were encrypted, said Lieutenant Gregory Ryan.

The virus, called CryptoLocker, has been attacking computers since late September or early October, a computer specialist told Ryan.

CryptoLocker is indiscriminate. The goal of the virus is not to take information from computers, but rather to lock the files and make victims pay to get them back within a limited period of time. If CryptoLocker is not paid by the time the ticker hits zero, the victim's files are locked forever, Ryan said.

Swansea police notified the FBI and made a "professional decision" to pay ransom to get their files back, Ryan said.

Information from the department's files was not compromised, Ryan said, and the department's operations were not affected during the three days the files were locked.

The department did have virus protection and a firewall installed, Ryan said.

Ryan said the department is taking advice from computer specialists on how to protect their system. He said additional measures were being taken.

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